

Senator Maria Cantwell – Working for Washington

Some of Maria's Work in the 109th Congress

Supporting Innovative, Home-Grown Solutions to our Energy Needs

Recent hikes in gas and energy rates demonstrate the volatility of relying almost exclusively on foreign fuel. Increased use of biofuels, such as biodiesel or ethanol produced from plant matter, would help ease the burden on consumers while creating jobs locally. To support home-grown sources of reliable energy, Maria worked to include language in the new energy bill to boost domestic production of biofuels from a wider variety of crops and agricultural waste. A recent WSU study estimated that Washington has enough wheat straw to produce about 200 million gallons of ethanol—and 1.2 billion gallons with technology improvements. By working to accelerate the development of clean, plant-based fuels, Maria is helping to initiate an important step toward emissions reduction, while at the same time decreasing our dependence on foreign oil.

Protecting the Arctic Refuge

Maria continues to use her seat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to lead the fight against oil exploration in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, which would result in just a six-month supply of oil that wouldn't reach the market for nearly a decade. While the Senate voted 51-49 to reject her amendment to strip provisions paving the way to Arctic drilling from the Senate budget resolution, Maria successfully brought national attention to the issue and will continue working to protect this irreplaceable natural treasure.

Addressing the Connection Between Identity Theft and Meth Abuse

The growing connection between identity theft, the nation's fastest-growing crime, and the use and production of methamphetamines, is an issue raised often during Maria's meetings with law enforcement officials from across Washington state. For example, according to the Spokane County Sheriff, 100 percent of the county's large-scale identity theft cases in 2004 included meth connections. In response, Maria introduced legislation to begin a national study of this troubling trend. Her bill, the Methamphetamine and Identity Theft Study Act, would also create a national database allowing federal, state, and local law enforcement to share information on crimes involving meth and identity theft, giving them an additional resource in the fight against both.

Saving Ratepayers from Enron's Greed

In May, during Senate Energy Committee hearings, Maria worked to include two important amendments in the new energy bill. The first would give the federal government the power to ban dishonest energy traders and corrupt corporate officials from working in the energy industry, preventing them from continuing to drive up costs through illegal trading practices. Her second amendment would stop Enron from suing Washington ratepayers. As ridiculous as it seems, Enron is suing Snohomish County ratepayers for \$122 million, demanding payment for electricity it never delivered.

Restoring Privacy to Library and Bookstore Records

Our nation's founding principles demand respect for personal privacy. That's why Maria is working to fix provisions in the PATRIOT Act that compromise the privacy of bookstore proprietors, librarians, and their customers. The SAFE Act, which Maria has cosponsored, would protect our nation's borders as well as our right to privacy by rolling back PATRIOT Act provisions that allow the federal government to acquire private records as part of secret, open-ended investigations into the activities of law-abiding Americans. Instead, government investigators would have to show a specific connection between the records they seek and a suspected terrorist or spy. In April, Maria called on the Senate Judiciary Committee to hold hearings on the bill, and will continue to push for a national security policy that doesn't come at the expense of our civil liberties.

Promoting Fair Competition for America's Aerospace Workers

Currently, Maria is working with a bipartisan group of senators to call on European governments to reject unfair subsidies for Airbus, and worked to pass a resolution supporting the president's authority to take action to protect American aerospace jobs. In particular, Airbus has benefited from a unique subsidy known as "launch aid," which is risk-free, low-cost government funding for the development of new lines of aircraft. The company only needs to repay the loans if the new product succeeds. This means Airbus remains unfettered by marketplace realities, while American companies must assume realistic levels of commercial risk. For this reason, Maria also wrote a letter to Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick asking him to redouble his efforts to get a commitment from the European Union to stop its support of launch aid.

Standing Up to Stop the Administration's BPA Rate Hike

Earlier this year, President Bush presented Congress with a budget proposal that could have doubled power costs for Washington state ratepayers by changing the way the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) sets its rates. Currently, about 70 percent of the electricity used in Washington is BPA power, and by demanding a shift to market based rates, this proposal could lead to a 39 percent price increase for many of Washington's residential customers. To protect Northwest consumers, Maria urged Energy Secretary Sam Bodman to abandon the proposal. Fortunately, in March, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH) announced that the rate hike would not be included in the Senate's Fiscal Year 2006 budget resolution. Maria will continue to fight on behalf of Washington ratepayers to keep this unfair proposal from resurfacing.

Cutting Your Taxes

For nearly two decades, Washington state taxpayers have been unable to deduct the state and local taxes they pay from their annual federal income tax returns. Maria worked to restore this important tax cut for the next two years as part of the American Jobs Creation Act, signed into law in October 2004. Now, as a cosponsor of similar legislation introduced this year by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), Maria is leading the effort to give Washington's economy a substantial boost by making this important tax cut permanent.

Fighting for Fiscal Fairness

Maria has consistently opposed measures in the President's Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposal that would undermine the federal government's commitments to Washington state on issues ranging from agriculture to education. Agriculture is the backbone of Washington's economy, and, unfortunately, the President's proposal calls for the elimination of the Hatch Act, which has helped fund WSU's agricultural research efforts for over 100 years. This spring, Maria joined grape, cherry, and potato growers to call on the Senate Appropriations Committee to reject the President's proposal. The budget also shortchanges key education programs, decreasing funding for math and science education, student loans, and vocational training. As a strong supporter of vital education initiatives such as Pell Grants, which provide financial aid to help qualified students attend college, Maria will continue to oppose cuts to programs that promote a highly-skilled workforce. She is also working to increase education savings opportunities by sponsoring a bill to increase the maximum annual tax-free contribution individuals can make to Coverdell education savings accounts.

Advocating on Behalf of Washington's Military Communities

Since entering the Senate, Maria has worked in support of Washington's military communities. In May, the Department of Defense released its list of recommended military base closures and realignments. The report recognized the importance of Washington's military bases, recommending that all major installations remain open. However, it included a personnel realignment plan for McChord Air Force Base that would result in the loss of 567 total personnel, 169 of which would move to Fort Lewis. In response Maria asked the Pentagon for details on the proposed realignment plan, and sought clarification regarding community concerns that McChord could lose up to seventy more personnel than called for in the original report.